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ABSTRACT

Teachers who want to act professionally need to participate in the decision making process. Sound knowledge of current theories is essential as is sound knowledge of students' needs as related to the goals of education. Of particular importance is the willingness to try out alternative approaches and to evaluate the effects of different strategies with individual students. Teachers need to be risk takers who reflect on the educational value of the experiences they took risks to implement. There are four possible ways teachers and administrators may acquire this inquiring/researching stance. One is to identify assumptions inherent in their teaching practices--the ways the furniture is arranged in the classroom, the grouping of students, and the sequencing of lessons. The second approach is to identify one important educational objective and plan a series of activities that will provide opportunities for one or more students to move toward achieving that objective. A third method is to choose a practice or an activity the teacher has read or heard about and evaluate its influence on individual student learners. The fourth approach involves trying out and evaluating the influence of a specific teaching activity currently used on several students' development or learning. (HOD)

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HOW CAN I GET TEACHERS TO BECOME INQUIRERS?

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People are constantly seeking solutions from others. As teachers we frequently act as if we believe the solutions to our teaching problems will be found in such places as the next textbook or journal that greets us in the mails, the next consultant who visits in our district, or the next graduate course which is offered at our local university.

By taking this stance, we remove ourselves from our professional role of designing and planning educational activities. Acting professionally is synonymous with active participation in the decision-making process. Several sources contribute to our decisions. Sound knowledge of current theories is essential. Knowledge of our students' needs as related to the goals of education is essential. We need to be able to implement a range of activities to help students meet the objectives. Of particular import for this presentation is the willingness to try out alternate approaches and to evaluate the effects of different strategies with individual students. We need to be risk takers who reflect on the educational value of the experiences we took risks to implement.

There are several approaches which I would like to share with you today that I have used with teachers and administrators

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to help them practice this inquiring, risk-taking stance. Some of these have been described in columns appearing in Language Arts which I write with John Mayher. Some of these I have used in consultancies or in classes such as those which Denise and Max have taken. The process of identifying the issue is critical and probably the most difficult. In order to identify an issue, we must acknowledge that there are some things we do not know. In contrast to being placed in the position of all-knowing, we are making ourselves vulnerable... we are asking questions which may be answered in ways which contradict our current and traditional practices. ... We are suggesting the need to continue learning, and the need to explore unique qualities of individuals as these are our students... and to plan activities which are appropriate for them - not for the "average" 8th grader whoever that might be.

I will describe 4 ways of obtaining this inquiring/researching stance.

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1. Identify assumptions inherent in our teaching practices

A. ways the furniture is arranged in the classroom

- teacher focused - student learns best when listening to the teacher
- student study carrels - student learns best when working in isolation and independently
- 30 students and 1 teacher is a good ratio for learning

B. Grouping of students

- age - all students learn at the same rate; those who don't should be "remediated"
- ability - all "creative" writers should be placed in the same class
- interest -all students interested in aviation should work on projects together focusing on that interest while increasing their knowledge
- weaknesses - students need to learn to spell before they can write what they want to write about

C. Sequencing of Lessons

- Textbooks, teachers manuals, curriculum guides provide the optimum organization of materials
- There are an absolute number of stories and

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poems that all students should study in the first 10 weeks of class

- Less able students should be given adaptations of text used by other students so that they are reading the same text

D. Scheduling of Classes

- 40-minute classes [with 8 classes per day] are the optimum learning time for all students
- Reading classes, English classes and Social studies classes should be offered daily in 40-minute time slots
- All classes should meet five times per week

E. Grading

- motivates student learning
- helps students identify what they don't understand
- rewards those who are conscientious
- documents progress
- must be done on all student products

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2. Identify one important educational objective and plan a series of activities which will provide opportunities for one or more students to move toward achieving this objective

   A. Getting students to become more expansive in their presentation of ideas in spoken and written contexts

   B. Getting students to participate in discussions

   C. Getting students to present their ideas coherently for others to understand

   D. Documenting student growth in language and learning

   E. Encouraging discriminate, risk-taking behavior

   F. Increasing self-confidence

3. Choose a practice or an activity you read or heard about and evaluate its influence on individual student learners

   - word processors
   - tape recorded stories
   - daily reading of literature to students
   - student journal keeping
   - student selected groups for projects or enterprises

4. Try out and evaluate the influence of a specific teaching activity currently used on several students' development or learning

   - vocabulary tests

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- spelling tests
- reading "skill" lessons
- discussions of literary works

The intent of the project is to discover. The inquiry focuses on the exploration of the veracity of our assumptions. And assumptions about the uniformity of student reactions are as much the focus of the research as are the assumptions about the uniformity of teacher reactions. There are no limitations on the questions or the strategies for answering the questions. Once the teacher has identified a focus, then that teacher has also accepted an inquiring stance. To continue the inquiry, procedures described by Max and Denise and those explained in the Language Arts column "Learning Through Teaching" provide examples. We invite your continued participation in the development of the inquiring stance in small groups in the rest of the session.

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